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ABSTRACT

Numerous methods for school reform have been promoted in the United States. Some lessons about school restructuring, reform, and improvement are offered in this report. The text examines four current educational reforms: Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools Project, Theodore R. Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, James Comer's School Development Program, and Robert Slavin's Success for All. Key questions include: What are these programs' goals, strategies, and accomplishments? What evidence points to their effectiveness in schools? and What overarching principles from these reforms can be applied to a school or district? A synthesis of the four reforms is offered, followed by a selected bibliography. The common characteristics of these reform efforts are their emphasis on powerful or authentic instruction, their restructuring of pedagogy to accommodate shifts to higher order thinking skills and problem solving, their alteration of governance to include all stakeholders in the educational process, their facilitation of learning and instruction through structure changes, and their emphasis on acceleration rather than remediation. An indepth story of each reform as told by the school leader responsible for implementing it is offered and includes ideas on staff development, inclusive frameworks, indicators of success, school climate, student achievement and learning, and other practical concerns. (RJM)

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New LEADERS
FOR TOMORROW'S SCHOOLS

Lessons From Four Réforms: Learning From Research and Practice

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VOLUME 1 NO. 2 WINTER 1995

SPECIAL EXPANDED ISSUE

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For Further Information *Inside back flap*

With this issue, we announce the new title of this publication: *New Leaders for Tomorrow's Schools*, formerly *New Leaders for Urban Schools*. We believe the enthusiastic response we received to our first issue warrants an expanded treatment and audience for this publication which examines cutting-edge topics in education — those most critical to the needs of your school and district.

This issue explores the lessons we can learn about school restructuring, reform, and improvement by examining four current educational reforms: James Comer's School Development Program, Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools Project, Theodore R. Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, and Robert Slavin's Success for All. We ask the following questions about each of these approaches: What are their goals, strategies, and accomplishments? What evidence points to their effectiveness in schools? What overarching principles from these reforms can you apply to your own school or district?

We first offer a synthesis of these four reforms, followed by a selected bibliography. Next, we present an in-depth story of each reform as told by the school leader responsible for putting it into action. Last, we provide the office address and telephone of each of the four reforms so that you can contact them for further information. We hope this issue helps you tailor restructuring and reform efforts to your own school or district.

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"What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?"

Van Gogh

A Synthesis of Four Reforms

by Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood

Can educational reform succeed? Under what conditions? What current reforms offer the most promise of raising student achievement, boosting teacher engagement, and fostering a sense of community? What are their goals and strategies? What evidence of success can they offer? Most important, will a particular reform flourish in your school? What do you need to know about educational reform before embarking on a school change initiative?

This essay summarizes and critiques four current reforms sustaining national discussion and debate: Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools Project, Theodore R. Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, James Comer's School Development Program, and Robert Slavin's Success for All. The personal accounts provided by practitioners that follow this essay provide concrete illustrations of each reform through the experiences of school leaders who are bringing about change in their schools or districts.

Why these four reforms? We selected them based on the following straightforward criteria:

- The presence of national media attention, discussion, and debate
- A decade or more of work that includes a pattern of growth and expansion
- A nationally prominent leader who has "created" the reform, disseminated its goals and methods nationally, and remained with the reform from its inception to the present
- Ongoing assessment of the reform's progress or success
- An ongoing program of research to assess the reform's impact on schools

The Reforms: Accelerated Schools — Don't Remediate, Accelerate

The Accelerated Schools Project grew out of research by Stanford University economist Henry M. Levin. Levin reports that his work in urban schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s fueled his desire to intervene in urban schools. Levin wanted to equalize the educational outcomes of poor and minority students — those traditionally considered most at risk of school failure. As a result, the central goal of Accelerated Schools is to bring all students, especially those characterized as "at risk," into the educational mainstream by the end of elementary school. The project began in 1986-87 with two elementary schools; by 1994-95, its beliefs were part of the fabric of school life in over 700 elementary and middle schools nationwide (Levin, 1994, p. 2).

Levin believes that remediation and an emphasis on basic skills, often advocated for low-achieving students, results in increased school failure and poor student outcomes. Therefore, the core tenet of Accelerated Schools is that schools should accelerate the learning of all students, rather than provide remediation when students fail or do not achieve at grade level. The project's social goals include reducing the dropout rate, drug use, and teen pregnancies (Levin, 1994, p. 10).

The core beliefs of the Accelerated Schools Project are ambitious. They include sustaining high teacher expectations for all children, building a coherent school vision, setting concrete goals to increase student achievement, creating "powerful learning experiences," defining challenges and finding solutions particular to the individual school, and working actively with parents and families (Hopfenberg et. al, 1993, pp. 17-18). The project emphasizes the importance of three principles that must permeate the school: "unity of purpose," "empowerment coupled with responsibility," and "building on strengths" (Hopfenberg et. al, 1993, p. 21).

What does this philosophy mean for the day-to-day functioning of schools? In an "accelerated school," school staff are supposed to work together as a group with a positive mindset, sharing responsibility for decisions and their outcomes. Instruction is viewed as a team effort that involves the broader community. Teams help students advance at a rapid pace to ensure future school and life

success. Considerable attention is paid to breaking the cycle of blame often present among administrators, teachers, and other school staff. In this cycle, school staff blame each other or parents when their efforts do not meet with success, or indict outside factors — such as the erosion of society.

In addition, school staff work to involve parents as key sources of information about their children. Administrators find that their leadership style changes to a facilitative and collaborative one in which all parties are connected by a common goal and teachers are expected to design powerful instruction and work collaboratively to bring about educational change.

The Accelerated Schools Project provides a guide for the first year of implementation that highlights the importance of assessing the current status of the school, developing a vision, setting priorities, creating new governance structures, and beginning the "Inquiry Process" (looking at challenges, brainstorming solutions, synthesizing solutions, developing an action plan, pilot testing the plan, and evaluating and reassessing (Hopfenberg et. al, 1993, p. 58).

"Our research suggests that you're not going to get significant, long-term reform unless you have subtle but powerful support and collaboration among teachers, students, and the families of those students in a particular community."

Theodore R. Sizer

The Coalition of Essential Schools: "Good Schools Are Unique"

Founded in 1984 by Theodore R. Sizer, former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and former headmaster of Andover Academy, the Coalition of Essential Schools initially concentrated on high schools — traditionally the most resistant to change — although elementary and middle schools have since joined the Coalition. The Coalition began with five schools in 1984; in 1995, participating schools number approximately 800 (O'Neil, 1995, p. 4).

The Coalition's philosophy of educational change is based on the "Nine Common Principles of Essential Schools," developed by Sizer after public reaction to his popular 1984 book about public schools, *Horace's Compromise*.

"The Nine Principles — which deliberately are sketched broadly with the intent that each school will place its own contextual overlay upon them — emphasize the student as worker, a philosophy of "less is more" or depth versus coverage, and authentic exhibitions that reveal the student's mastery of subject matter."

As Sizer says: "We start from the assumption that good schools are unique. In order to be good, a school has to reflect its own community. And therefore, we offer no model. There's nothing that you just "put into place," nothing to "implement." Our research suggests that you're not going to get significant, long-term reform unless you have subtle but powerful support and collaboration among teachers, students, and the families of those students in a particular community" (O'Neil, 1995, p. 4).

The Coalition focuses on the relationship between students, teachers, and the curriculum — the "triangle of learning" (Muncey & McQuillan, 1993, p. 487) plus the structural changes schools must make to improve and facilitate that triangle.

Although the Coalition maintains that school change must emanate from the school site and/or building level — emphasizing that schools differ dramatically and that there is no "magic bullet" for school improvement — it also acknowledges the importance of educational policy. In 1988 the Coalition entered a partnership with the Education Commission of the States (ECS) to form "Re:Learning." In this joint effort, ECS works with state and local agencies to create a policy environment favorable to the reforms that the Coalition advocates. The Coalition itself concentrates solely on schools embarking on or sustaining the curricular and pedagogical changes it

advocates. The Coalition embraces structural changes in addition to its original emphasis on teaching and learning.

In order to become a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a school submits a statement of its long-term goals and an action plan to the Coalition for review. According to Coalition literature, the action plan must state how structures, pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment will change, and it must include a statement of faculty commitment to student learning and engagement (Coalition of Essential Schools, 1995, p. 2). In addition to following the action plan, a majority of school staff must agree that embarking on reform based on the Coalition's principles is indeed what they want and value; community support must be solicited throughout the process; and a school-site coordinator needs to be identified who will work as a liaison between the school, the regional or state coordinator, and the Coalition.

The Coalition identifies typical stages of membership, called "exploring" and "planning" (Coalition of Essential Schools, 1995, p. 2). During these stages, it is necessary to begin a "conversation" among faculty, parents, and school board members using the Nine Common Principles to structure the dialogue. Faculty are encouraged to visit essential schools and take advantage of professional development opportunities sponsored by the Coalition.

As the dialogue evolves, staff agree on an action plan for the first year, which includes a "supporting rationale" and an outline of both instructional and structural changes to be undertaken (Coalition of Essential Schools, 1995, p. 2). The faculty defines the "essential skills" for students in that school and the areas of knowledge that students need to articulate and demonstrate through exhibitions.

Membership in the Coalition of Essential Schools includes a responsibility to participate in a network with other Coalition schools. Coalition literature (1995, p. 4) details its expectations for member schools, which include commitment, whole-school involvement, documentation and assessment of progress, and funds to support the school over the several years the Coalition estimates it will take to accomplish the significant pedagogical and structural changes that this reform entails.

James Comer's School Development Program: Families, Communities, Schools

James Comer, a child psychiatrist based at Yale University, has advocated a particular type of school reform/change since the late 1960s, but only recently has it received considerable national attention. His model, the School Development Program (often informally called "the Comer model"), focuses on urban, inner-city schools and communities as the main players in an elaborate drama that usually ends with children's school failure and later failure in society.

Comer's team at the Yale Child Study Center began work with two elementary schools in New Haven in 1968 under the premise that basic principles of child development and social science could be applied to schools and a healthy outcome would result (Payne, 1991, p. 9). Emphasizing what Comer calls children's "developmental pathways" and the quality of relationships inside schools and between schools and communities, the model pays attention to social factors that influence academic achievement.

Comer's model differs from school effectiveness programs in its keen use of history to explain the deterioration of urban communities and the breaking of ties between families and schools (Payne, 1991). His view absolves urban families of blame for the educational predicament

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The power of adults to affect children's lives has diminished significantly, Comer believes, leaving children adrift, purposeless, and without guidance toward productive lives in school or outside of school. Parents of color and low-income parents, he points out, often lack the formal expertise and energy to direct their children toward success. Since their life circumstances may dictate a focus upon survival only, success — particularly academic success — can remain a remote and elusive concept.

of their children, but does not indict schools or school staff. Instead, Comer sees the erosion of society as a social, political, and economic process much larger than individuals or even institutions.

Part of Comer's message is familiar to educators. Children, he emphasizes, have far fewer adults in their lives than they should; the adults close to them often are less involved in their children's lives than in past decades due to a variety of factors.

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The concept of community, including solid and caring relationships, permeates Comer's work and appears in the structural features of his model, which he describes as a "systemic process that targets the entire school for change" (Haynes & Comer, 1993, p. 168).

The most important structural component, he believes, is the governance team, made up of all adults in the school and led by the principal. Second is the parents program, which involves as many parents as possible in social and volunteer activities and the work of the governance committee. Third, and perhaps most novel, is the "mental health team," which pushes teachers and parents to look for solutions to problems presented by students, emphasizing child development principles.

These three components are intended to work within three general guidelines: a no-fault policy, stakeholder involvement in the decision making process, with ultimate deference to the principal's authority, and decision making by consensus.

Comer encourages shared power not just because it will improve the quality of decisions, but also because it can lead to more positive relationships between people. This approach acknowledges the elaborate politics and infighting that plague many organizations, especially those already riddled with problems of territory and turf.

Success for All: Early and Vigorous Intervention

Robert Slavin, a researcher at Johns Hopkins University, developed the Success for All program as a highly focused early intervention for children deemed at risk of academic failure in urban schools. Based on the premise that children must be able to read at grade level by the end of third grade or they probably will fail in school, Success for All works intensively on children's reading, mathematics, and language skills, beginning at the preschool level and continuing through the third grade. The overarching intent of the program is to ensure that children do not receive remediation and are never retained in grade. Considerable staff resources are devoted to this end. Children who appear to be flagging in their progress receive one-on-one tutoring, are assessed every eight weeks to facilitate instructional modifications, and are grouped according to their reading performance.

Although Success for All clearly emphasizes building basic skills, especially in reading, it differs from conventional approaches in that it focuses on moving children along with whatever school resources are needed so that they do not fall behind grade level. School staff must persist in their efforts

"Paths clear before those who know where they're going and are determined to get there."

Leonard Roy Frank

to boost student achievement — a quality Slavin calls "relentlessness"— even when solutions are not immediately apparent (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, 1995, p. 12).

One of the program's most important features is one-on-one reading instruction, which research shows is extremely effective (Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989). Students are tutored in 20-minute sessions away from the class during a 60-minute social studies period. To ensure that the regular reading program and the tutoring initiatives complement each other, tutors usually work on the same concepts taught in the regular reading program. Tutors also are on hand during daily 90-minute reading periods.

Students are grouped heterogeneously in grades 1-3, but their groupings shift during the reading instruction period when groups of approximately 15 students are formed based upon reading performance. In this highly structured approach to reading instruction, tutors and reading teachers interact and meet regularly. (For specifics on the method of reading instruction consult Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Livermon, & Dolan, 1990.)

The program demands extra staff to support its efforts in addition to the reading tutors. Two social workers and one parent liaison are needed to work full-time in Success for All schools. Their major responsibility is to provide parenting education so that parents will encourage their students to succeed in school. These staff members also intervene if they see evidence of family problems, ill health, or student behavior problems.

A full-time facilitator works with the principal at the school site to supervise the Success for All model. This individual visits classes and works on problems with tutors and teachers, while managing the interactions between the Family Support Team with instructional staff. Slavin recommends that schools use Title I monies to finance the additional staff required by the program.

The staff development that Success for All teachers receive is ongoing and evolving. Initial on-site training is provided for three full days by consultants from the Success for All program. Follow-up training includes observation of teachers' actual work in the classroom.

Finally, the Success for All model features an "advisory committee" rather than a governance team, although its composition is similar to the governance teams recommended by other models: principal, teacher representatives, program facilitator, social worker, and research staff from Success for All.

How Well Do They Work?: The Evidence

How well do the four reforms work in schools that have tried to use their ideas and strategies? What do the projects' own findings suggest, and what do the evaluations of others indicate?

Accelerated Schools

The Accelerated Schools Project has in-house findings, but to date has not produced systematic, controlled research that has been published elsewhere. In its in-house findings, the project provides brief vignettes of member schools' accomplishments, which are categorized as student achievement and learning, enriched curriculum and instruction, improvements in school climate, and family and community involvement (Wong, 1995, pp. 1-6).

Student achievement and learning includes brief vignettes, showing student gains on standardized tests. The following examples are typical of the vignettes: 52 percent of the students were at grade

level at one school before it became an accelerated school, but this number increased to 88 percent at grade level at the end of second grade after three years of acceleration. At a different school, students showed performance increases on the math portion of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) after three years of participation in the project. Sixth graders showed a 57 percent increase, 7th graders an increase of 40 percent, and eighth graders a 45 percent increase (Wong, 1995, p. 2).

In enriched curriculum and instruction, Wong (1995, p. 4) points to changes within some accelerated schools that included eliminating tracking, mainstreaming bilingual and Chapter 1 students into accelerated classrooms, and developing common planning time for interdisciplinary curricula.

The project findings also show improvements in school climate (Wong, 1995, p. 5), citing a decrease in suspensions from 100 to 47 after one year of participation in the project, a decline in retention in grade from 7 percent to 2 percent at one school, and a 10 percent increase in student attendance at one elementary school after three years of involvement.

Finally, the project cites improvements in family and community involvement, which include expansion of the number of parent volunteers from 0 to 250, an increase in parent attendance at teacher/parent conferences from 52 percent to 84 percent; and an almost threefold increase in financial support of school functions (Wong, 1995, p. 6).

The Coalition of Essential Schools

Two key articles report preliminary findings from a five-year study of the Coalition of Essential Schools (Muncey & McQuillan, 1993) and assess its later restructuring efforts (Prestine & Bowen, 1993). Muncey and McQuillan's (1993) findings focused on eight schools that were charter members of the Coalition. The findings are provocative and, as the authors point out, can be generalized to other reform efforts:

- In most of the schools, staff did not uniformly believe that changes in school structure or teaching practices were necessary, believing instead that society needed to change before school outcomes could improve.
- Joining the Coalition forced school staff to examine the school's philosophy, resulting in differences in staff attitudes toward their work, the school's mission, and the best ways to educate students.
- Starting points for reform tended to be those concepts that individuals could apply with minimal disruption to the school as a whole
- A core of faculty was essential to the reform at each school, but the presence of this core divided the faculty.
- Divisions within schools as a result of Coalition membership reduced communication among faculty.
- Most Coalition supporters were naive about issues of power and politics within their schools.
- A key assumption among the schools was that there was little need to refine a reform once it had been "accepted" (Muncey & McQuillan, 1993, pp. 487-488).

In an attempt to assess the success of the Coalition's work on school structure and its influence on curriculum and instruction, Prestine and Bowen (1993) looked at four schools that in 1989 decided to restructure themselves following the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools.

The authors report that observable change was often confined to small

At different schools, the following Accelerated Schools findings were reported:

- ***52% of students were at grade level before acceleration; this increased to 88% after three years of acceleration***
- ***Sixth graders showed a 57% increase on the math portion of the California Test of Basic Skills, 7th graders an increase of 40% and eigth graders a 45% increase after three years of acceleration***
- ***Suspensions decreased from 100 to 47 after one year of participation***
- ***Retention in grade decreased from 7% to 2% after one year of participation***
- ***Student attendance increased 10% after three years of participation***
- ***Parent volunteers expanded from 0 to 250, parent attendance at teacher/parent conferences grew from 52% to 84%, and financial support of school functions showed an almost threefold increase***

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"Become the lesson you would teach."

Leonard Roy Frank

Following the implementation of Success for All in one inner-city Baltimore school in the 1987-88 school year, the first-year assessment showed "substantially higher student performance on measures of language development in preschool and kindergarten and on measures of reading in Grades 1-3 compared to students in a matched school" (Madden et al., 1993, p. 125). Gains in reading were especially high for students who previously had been in the lowest 25 percent of their class on pretests.

projects and needed to expand its scope. All-school participation was aided when schools moved aggressively to restructure, pushing those who were unwilling to go along with the change process out of the school, with teachers, administrators, and parents moving into new roles of leadership.

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of improvement in student outcomes is provided by the Central Park East (CPE) schools in New York City, whose reform efforts were fueled by the participatory leadership style of Deborah Meier, co-founder and former principal of the schools. Meier (1995) describes the student populations of the four schools within the CPE complex as predominantly African American and Latino from low-income or poor families. Eighty-five percent of the first seven graduating classes (1977-84) of CPE elementary school received regular diplomas; another 11 percent received GEDs. Before CPE opened its own secondary school, two-thirds of its elementary school graduates who completed high school went on to college. Ninety percent of the 1991 graduating class of Central Park East Secondary School went on to pursue some type of postsecondary education. Meier points out that these figures have been sustained for successive graduating classes.

Success for All

Robert Slavin and his project team have conducted rigorous, systematic, empirical research and ongoing evaluation of the Success for All project. Slavin and his colleagues (Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1993) studied five Baltimore schools over a period of three years for four schools and four years for one school. When they compared students in these schools with matched students in schools not using the Success for All program, they discovered strong positive effects, with retentions in grade substantially reduced and attendance over time in the Success for All schools also increased.

Following the implementation of Success for All in one inner-city Baltimore school in the 1987-88 school year, the first-year assessment showed "substantially higher student performance on measures of language development in preschool and kindergarten and on measures of reading in Grades 1-3 compared to students in a matched school" (Madden et al., 1993, p. 125). Gains in reading were especially high for students who previously had been in the lowest 25 percent of their class on pretests. For those students, the authors report +.80 effect sizes, on average, on individually administered measures.

Reading gains continued at this impressive rate through the third grade. As a bonus, retention in grade decreased — a major goal of the program. In 1990-91, retention in grade was near zero in three of the five schools (Madden et al., 1993).

Achievement gains are particularly noticeable for those students who were the lowest in their grade at the beginning of the program, leading the authors to conclude that Success for All reduced the number of students performing below grade level (1993, p. 143). Matched students not in Success for All schools performed at least a year below grade level on the reading measures; three times as many matched students lagged two or more years behind.

Slavin and his colleagues also report that "of the more than 150 schools that have used the program for periods of 1-7 years, only six have dropped out

Coalition of Essential Schools findings include:
- *In most of the schools, staff did not uniformly believe that changes in school structure or teaching practices were necessary, believing instead that society needed to change before school outcomes could improve*
- *Joining the Coalition forced school staff to examine the school's philosophy, resulting in differences in staff attitudes toward their work, the school's mission, and the best ways to educate students*
- *Starting points for reform tended to be those concepts that individuals could apply with miminal disruption to the school as a whole*
- *A core of faculty was essential to the reform at each school, but the presence of this core divided the faculty*

(in all cases because of changes of principals)" (Slavin et al., 1995, p. 30). This persistence of Success for All, despite vicissitudes of funding and staff changes, appears to be yet another indicator of the program's effectiveness.

The School Development Program

The School Development Program has existed the longest of the four reforms and documented its early progress in New Haven schools quite carefully. In 1968, a team from the Yale Child Study Center began work in two New Haven elementary schools that were judged among the worst in the city. One school dropped out of the program; by 1978-89 the other was outperforming many of the schools in New Haven, except what Payne (1991) termed "the most socially privileged schools in New Haven" (p. 9). By 1984, it outpertormed some of them as well (Comer, 1980, 1989). Other New Haven schools that joined the program experienced similar improvements, resulting in the program's systemwide adoption. As of 1991, no formal, full-scale evaluation of the program was available, but Comer's writings indicate significant gains in test scores, suspension rates, parental involvement, and both student and teacher attendance (Goldberg, 1990; Daniels, 1990; Haynes & Hamilton-Lee, 1987, 1988).

Haynes and Comer (1993) provide information about the academic effects of the School Development Program with school-level aggregated data. They cite a 1986 analysis of achievement data in the Benton Harbor, Michigan schools that showed 4-year gains between 7.5 and 11.0 percentage points in reading and mathematics at the second, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades for SDP schools (Haynes and Comer, 1993, p. 194). A 1987 assessment of SDP effects conducted by the research office of the Prince George's County Public Schools showed "significantly greater" percentile gains on the California Achievement Test between 1985 and 1987 (Haynes & Comer, 1993, P. 194). The authors also refer to an analysis of fourth grade achievement data in the two pioneer schools in New Haven conducted by the SDP research team, which showed that mathematics and reading achievement scores increased steadily between 1969 and 1984, with grade equivalent scores of approximately 3.0 in reading and mathematics in 1969 to 6.0 in reading and 5.0 in mathematics in 1984.

The Evidence: What Does It Suggest To School Leaders?

Clearly, these four reforms share certain characteristics, including an emphasis on "powerful" or "authentic" instruction, changes in pedagogy to accommodate shifts to higher-order thinking skills and problem solving, shifts in governance to include all stakeholders in the educational process, structural changes to facilitate learning and instruction, and an emphasis on acceleration rather than remediation.

What can a school leader learn from these syntheses of four current reforms? How can they guide his or her own efforts in leading the complicated process of school change and reform? We have discovered some overarching principles to guide preliminary discussion of reform within the school or district:

- The broader the consensus, the greater the probability that the reform will succeed.
- Careful examination of the school's philosophy is a tedious, sometimes divisive, but necessary process.
- Determining whether school staff really believe change is necessary is an essential first step.
- The school leader and staff must support each other in order for the reform to succeed.
- When people work collaboratively and share power, the quality of their relationships improves as trust develops.
- The power of politics and personalities to erode reform efforts never should be underestimated; however, with proper attention, such factors do not need to disable reform.
- Within a collaborative framework, agreeing not to undercut the leader seems essential for reform to succeed.
- Parental involvement — viewing parents as experts on their children rather than the enemy — will break down barriers between schools and communities and develop a climate of trust.

On a particularly encouraging note, Theodore Sizer, James Comer, Howard Gardner, and the Education Development Center have joined forces to create Project ATLAS, funded by the New American Schools Development Corporation. As these school reform leaders combine what they have learned and the fundamental principles of their reforms, we see a positive theme emerge — collaboration between and among reforms.

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"Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future."

John F. Kennedy

Making Schools Better: Stories of Four Reforms

by Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood

The School Development Program: West Mecklenburg High School, Charlotte, North Carolina

West Mecklenburg High School, Charlotte, North Carolina, has a student body of approximately 1,450 students: 51% Caucasian, 46% African American, 1.4% Asian, 0.3% Hispanic, and 0.8% Native American. The principal who led it through the School Development Program of James Comer, Dennis R. Williams, is now the Chief Administrative Officer for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System. Williams holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Intermediate Education from Winston-Salem State University, a Master of Education degree in Education Administration and Supervision, and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

When Dennis Williams went to West Mecklenburg High School as its new principal in 1992, he knew his job wasn't going to be easy. A neighboring high school, which he describes as "somewhat dysfunctional," had just closed and reopened as a magnet school for science, math, and technology. As a result, approximately 400 students with significant discipline problems who had attended the school were sent to West Mecklenburg.

"Just as we were beginning the whole Comer process," Williams remembers, "these additional students entered the school. It was fairly significant, because on a scale of 1 to 10 — with 1 the lowest and 10 the highest — West Mecklenburg functioned at the 2 level. Out of the 11 high schools in the district, West Mecklenburg was certainly in the bottom quartile."

The entry of new students known to have serious discipline problems further polarized an already divided school and community. "The students who joined us were angry because we had been their archrivals," he says. "Parents were skeptical about their presence, teachers were overly concerned about having them in the school, and the student body didn't want them, either."

Although race relations between African American and White students caused some conflict, racial tension was not the sole problem, Williams reports. "We had a very large population with serious delays in their learning, so the academic and social challenge was tremendous."

Why the Comer model? Why not some other school reform initiative that offered hope for improved school dynamics and boosted student achievement? "The Comer model is built on child development principles," Williams notes, "with a heavy emphasis on relationships. Those two factors make it different from other school reform efforts.

"Dr. Comer makes it perfectly clear that education is a people business," he emphasizes, "and we have to be concerned about the total child if we are going to move from point A to point B. We cannot be so driven by results that we forget about relationships. That is a key difference with the Comer process. While we understand that student achievement is about learning, we feel that the only way we can achieve the type of results that we would like to see in schools is to pay particular attention to relationships, to developing the total child."

Williams saw the first step toward reform as dialogue: discussion that engaged as many stakeholders as possible, including students, parents, teachers, support staff — "every single staff member," he says, which uncovered long-held perceptions of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Responsibility and Results

One key component of the Comer model is its emphasis on a no-blame philosophy that simultaneously insists that all stakeholders must take responsibility for improved outcomes. "We didn't need to waste time pointing fingers," Williams says. "Because

"We had many teachers who would say: 'Give us better students and we will produce better results.' We had to make it clear that we understood that the teachers' job was tough, and we were there to support them, but we had to have an attitude that we could make a difference in students' lives."

of the tough school climate at that time, it was easy for students to point fingers at teachers, who pointed fingers at parents, who pointed fingers back. Everybody pointed at the central office for creating the situation. We knew this was wasted energy, and if we didn't stop doing it we wouldn't make progress."

Abandoning blame meant embracing responsibility for change, he says — an important distinction. Many teachers, he reports, had given up on students altogether.

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"We had to believe," he says, "that what is most important is not what students bring with them when they come to school but what they meet when they arrive."

Establishing Credibility

Williams encountered considerable skepticism from staff, whom he describes as "traditionalists" — who had seen reforms come and go with little improvement. "They had seen reform after reform with no positive impact, and instead, things were getting rapidly worse," he explains. "We had to demonstrate to the faculty that this process would be different — and that the leader was serious about sharing responsibility with staff."

Although shared decision making is an integral piece of the Comer model, Williams told staff he reserved the right to make two percent of the decisions. Ninety-eight percent of the decisions would be made by teachers in collaboration with parents and central office staff. "I didn't have enough faith at the time to give up total authority," he remembers. "I felt it was my duty to reserve the right to make some of the decisions. As it turned out, I made less than 2 percent of the decisions. Instead, I influenced the decisions of others.

"We talked a great deal about the collective wisdom of the group," Williams recalls. "The philosophy that we embraced was that no one person can possess wisdom that is greater than the wisdom of the entire teaching staff, the entire school community. That community, obviously, includes the principal.

"I made it perfectly clear that I didn't have all the answers, that if we were going to progress everybody had to participate in the process. Each person, in my mind, held a piece of the puzzle. We needed everybody to bring his or her own piece to the table so we could fit the puzzle together. Teachers saw that I shared information freely with them; that influenced their decisions. Many leaders refuse to share information."

He recognized that sharing information was key to the reform's success and a very powerful gesture on his part, as was his willingness to allow decisions to be made that he might not personally endorse. As a result, he gained credibility.

"They saw that their principal meant business, that his actions were consistent with what he said. On issues that were really sensitive to me, I would not exercise the 2 percent authority that I retained for myself. Instead, I would go along with the team decision, but if we were not successful and did not receive the results that we should have received, then I pointed out to teachers that they would have to be bold enough to bring the issue back to the table so we could discuss it again."

He shrewdly points out a characteristic of human nature that he used to further the reform: "Any time the majority of your staff wants to do something and understands it is up to them to make sure it is successful, they will do everything they can to make sure that the kids succeed with that particular strategy."

Enacting the School Development Program

Although the School Development Program is specific about the need for three "mechanisms," three "guiding principles," and three "operations," Williams tailored the model to fit his own leadership style and the school's needs.

Instead of allowing teachers to self-select to serve on the school's governance committee, Williams admits he interviewed teachers from different disciplines in an attempt to get "the best and the brightest" on the team. "It is a way to start," he reflects, "but I don't advise anyone to continue in that way. Over time, of course, teachers voted for the representative they want from their discipline."

At the beginning, he took an active role in managing meetings — perhaps more active than the School Development Program would recommend. "I had to set the tone and show them what the process should produce over time. After a month or so, we selected co-chairs for the school planning and management team. These co-chairs were teachers who slowly accepted the leadership role. As they did so, others began to participate more fully.

"Of course," he adds, "the process evolved over time. The immediate goal was to ensure that all strategies and day-to-day operations filtered through the school planning and management team, but what happened over time was that the team became facilitators of the decision making process as opposed to being the decision makers themselves."

He admits to early hostility from faculty. "Initially, the faculty perceived the group as an elitist team of decision makers who were favorites of the principal and held the upper hand on other staff members."

To change that perception, the teachers on the planning and management team had to show through their actions and beliefs that they were not the sole decision makers for the school. "I had to drill into the hearts of the teachers on the team that they were not the decisionmakers. Instead, it was their job to get out within their various disciplines, mingle with their peers, and bring back input that was reflective of the whole faculty." Did this effort diminish some of the perceptions that the planning and management team were the favored few? "Initially, teachers didn't believe me," Williams says. "I was not the first administrator they had encountered who promised them power in the decision making process."

Creating a Collaborative Climate

At the same time that the planning and management team was created, West Mecklenburg began a student services management team — referred to by Comer as the mental health team — because a large number of students required a variety of support systems. Bringing all support staff together to serve on that committee broke up the previously fragmented approach to support services, under which social workers, school psychologists, and counselors worked in isolation from one another and from classroom teachers.

"This group mapped out an action plan to deal with the problems we knew we had in the building at that time," Williams says. "As we involved teachers in the decision making process about the instructional program, we simultaneously tried to provide support to students and teachers so they could both be successful in the classroom.

"The third mechanism, the parent component, began the first year as a message to parents. We worked to let them know that we needed all parents — not just those who had been involved traditionally through the PTA or

"We had to believe that what is most important is not what students bring with them when they come to school but what they meet when they arrive."

the Booster Club."

The strategy for reaching parents who had disconnected themselves from the educational process was proactive: Williams sent a core group of volunteer parents out into the community. "We divided our attendance areas into zones," he remembers, "and held community meetings in the neighborhoods to try to interest parents in the school. Our message was: We care about your children; we need for you to be involved in the educational process.

"Initially, those parents who had not been involved with the school were the biggest critics of what we were doing. They had a lot of concerns, and they wanted to share them. Once we got through that — which is to be expected — they also became involved in the decision making process, finding ways to support their children and the teachers. That support made an enormous difference in the school climate almost immediately, because the sons and daughters of those parents were the biggest challenge for our teachers.

"We recruited a very small nucleus of parents who were bold enough to go into their neighborhoods, knock on doors, make telephone calls, look parents eye to eye, and ask for their involvement."

"Their parents had been disconnected from the educational process for years. We knew we had to get them involved because of the high correlation between parent involvement and student success in school. Going to the neighborhoods and their churches was a very powerful strategy. We recruited a very small nucleus of parents who were bold enough to go into their neighborhoods, knock on doors, make telephone calls, look parents eye to eye, and ask for their involvement."

Parents were represented on the planning and management team as well, but their participation grew slowly. "We began somewhat traditionally with the PTA president and the Booster Club president," he recalls, "and then recruited some other parents. Over a year or so, the parent component grew so large that we had a separate parent committee."

Parents were involved in school activities in traditional ways — such as fundraising and open houses — and in newer, less traditional ways. "We told teachers to expect to see parents in and out of their classrooms and to welcome them as partners. We tried to make our school as inviting as possible to parents, just as we tried to make it inviting to children.

"On another level, we wanted to move parents into decision making for the school. We really believe that if we give parents the same information we have and guide them through the process, their input will be just as critical as anyone else's input. We needed their support for the changes we were going to make."

As an example, Williams points to a schedule change from a six-period day to a four-period day. Other changes included instituting Tech Prep, national models for teaching civic and social responsibility, and the advent of new, strict disciplinary policies. Parents helped design these changes so that they would be successful.

The Best That We Can Do

In order to move into strategies that would affect student learning and achievement directly, Williams led a schoolwide scrutiny of student achievement. "We looked at all indicators of success," he says, "including SAT scores, scores on standardized tests, disciplinary reports, teacher performance, our dropout rate, and the number of students we had in high-level courses. Everybody was involved in the process. At the end of it, we asked: 'Is this the very best we can do?' The answer was, of course: 'No, this is not the best we can do.'

"I then asked: 'If we continue to do the same things we have done over the past ten years, do you think we can

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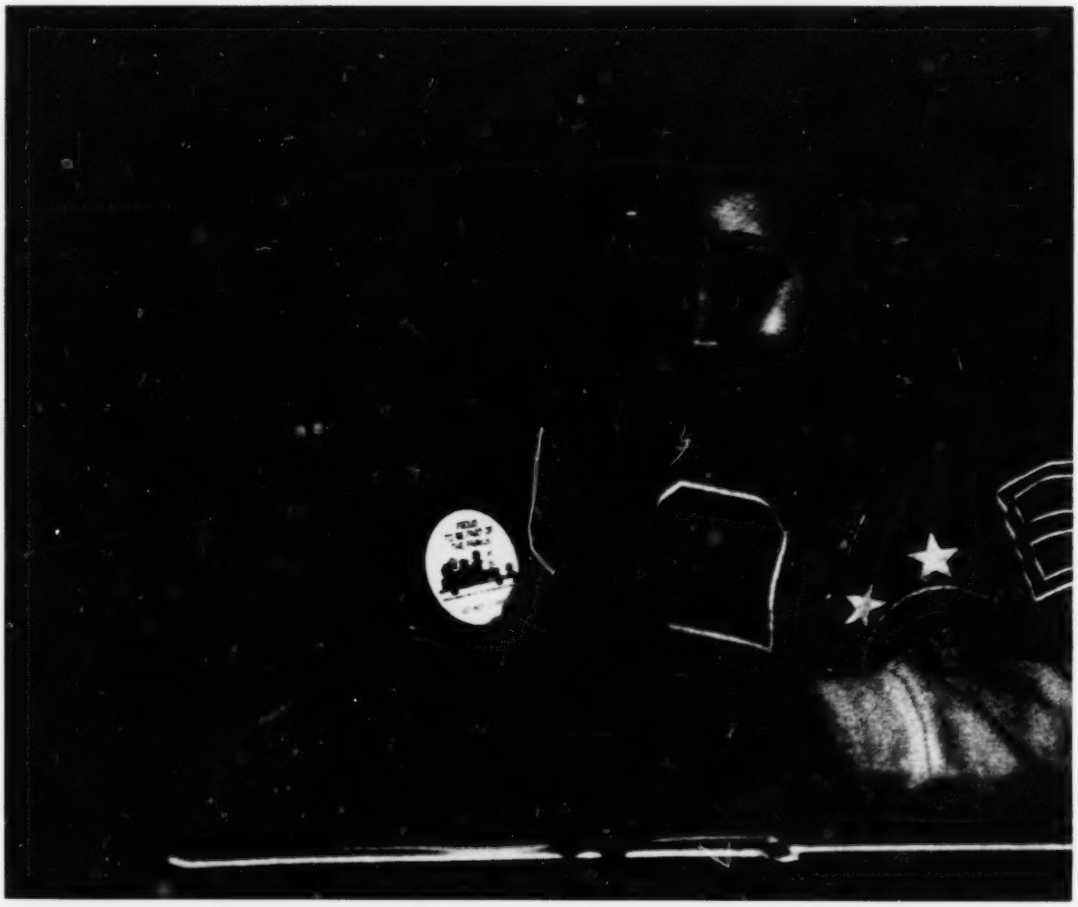


"Education cannot be for students in any authentic way, if it is not of and by them."

William H. Schubert

"The first day of school at the first faculty meeting, I made the following statement: 'If you do not want to be at a school where students are achieving at high levels to the point that we receive national and international recognition for our efforts to be of service to students, you are in the wrong place at the wrong time."

produce results other than what we see right here? Do you think it is time we consider doing things differently?' The answer to the latter question was 'Yes.' I gave them my assurance that they would be involved in the decisions about what we needed to do differently, and this assurance motivated them to engage in the process. We were able to establish something people don't talk about anymore, and this is trust.

"I believe firmly that people do not venture out into new directions unless they feel they have the trust of the administration and also that there is trust between teachers and parents."

The Necessity of Trust

The first step in boosting student achievement was to change from an annual assessment to assessments at the end of each quarter, which enabled staff to make curricular and instructional modifications prior to the end of the school year.

Based on the weaknesses that the assessments revealed, staff developed a comprehensive school plan — another integral feature of the School Development Program — to address areas of concern. "Our plan included more than academic goals," Williams says. "Teachers had concerns about discipline, so we found the teachers who were best at discipline and had them share strategies with other teachers as well as conduct a dialogue with them about what they could do differently.

"If we were dealing with cooperative learning as a strategy, we had to make sure that people understood how to work together as peers. We had teachers discuss it at faculty meetings — but we made sure the discussion was very structured. It was informal, and everyone felt she could participate. Whatever strategy we addressed depended on what people felt they needed help with."

During the second year of the School Development Program's implementation, Williams believes the school truly became a community of learners. "During the first year, everything was happening so quickly that teachers didn't completely grasp all of it. They needed time to reflect, and when they came back the second year they came back as different people."

But the atmosphere of the first year was tough, Williams emphasizes, and district support enabled him to maintain a "no excuses" policy. "We expected everybody to perform at high levels. My job was to support teachers and students so that could occur. If we had teachers who didn't care about students, who were ineffective, who were not receptive to the type of support system we had in place, I was very clear about the results. We would run those teachers out of the school just as fast as we could."

A number of teachers chose to leave the school the first year, he remembers. "The first day of school at the first faculty meeting, I made the following statement: 'If you do not want to be at a school where students are achieving at high levels to the point that we receive national and international recognition for our efforts to be of service to students, you are in the wrong place at the wrong time. We will support our students, we will demonstrate excellence in everything we do, and those people who do not want to do that will not be allowed to stay.'

"I also stated that we would not wait until the end of the school year to dismiss people. In October, people started to leave. The first six months were very stressful because we had some teachers in the school who should not have been teachers. They had no interest in students. Some were misplaced and we counseled them into other jobs. Others had to be pushed out. We lost one administrator who was very popular; that created a lot of tension. New rules for students weren't easy, either."

Yet the toughness that extended across the

board was more than necessary, he believes. "The first year, I confiscated 14 handguns. Students were not used to high expectations about discipline. A number of them were not accustomed to going to their classes. Attendance was an issue, and as a result, parent support for our school had dwindled."

Beyond Basic Skills

One of Williams's first actions to improve student learning was to eradicate all basic skills classes. "Expectations for a number of students in the school were: 'They can't do anything but the minimum.' We had students floating through the school taking courses out of sequence, taking courses in a way that wouldn't prepare them to do anything once they left the school. A smaller percentage were really focused on taking the right courses and preparing themselves for the future."

The result of eliminating the basic skills courses meant that students began to be pushed to achieve at higher levels. "It was stressful for both students and teachers. Students were not used to being in academically challenging classes, and teachers were not used to diversity in their classrooms. We had to provide simultaneous support to students and to teachers to make it work."

After six months, students began to ease into the new discipline policies and teachers relaxed as they worked with students. "Over time," Williams reports, "higher expectations were established. Both students and teachers stopped fussing about it; it was the new norm."

As he reflects about the stressful first months of change, Williams identifies the premise of his ongoing argument: "Everyone wants to be attached to a school that is doing well. High school students want to have a great school experience. Teachers want to feel that they are having an impact on student achievement. When we share an expectation of excellence, everybody benefits. The question becomes: How do we work together to make that happen?"

To show students that discipline policies had teeth, the school suspended students involved in fights for ten days and filed charges against them. "Many times they ended up in jail and parents had to get them out, which cost $125. Once students understood that it didn't matter who you were, who your parents were, which side of town you lived on, if you fought on campus you would be arrested and prosecuted — and suspended from school for ten days — that got their attention."

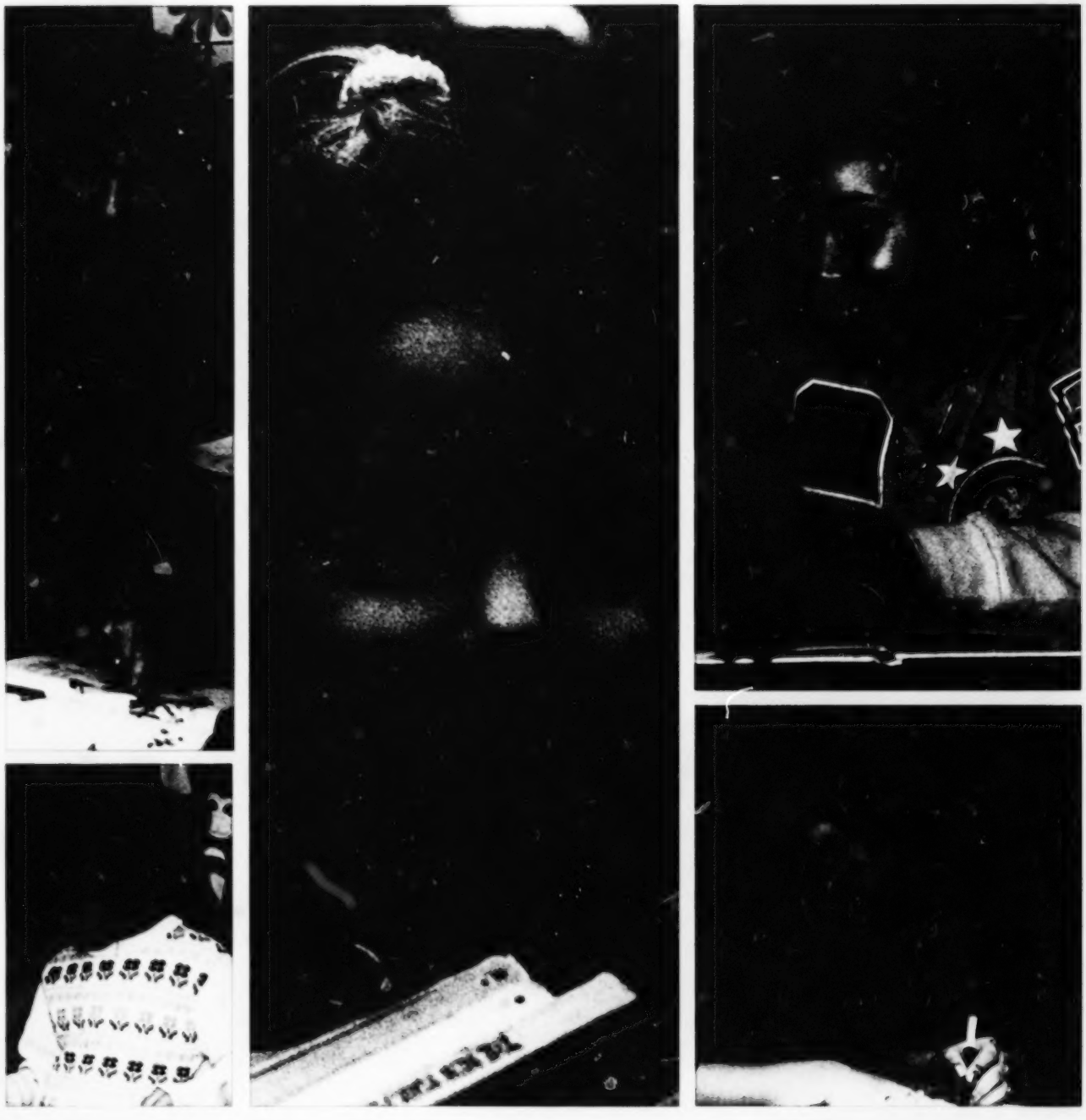
Even though parents had to pay to bail their children out of jail, their anger wasn't directed at the school, Williams says, because they were deeply concerned about safety on campus and the well-being of their children. "This was a small percentage of students who were holding everyone hostage in a situation where no one could learn."

Indicators of Success

The first indicator of success became students' willingness to talk to the administration and to teachers. "Students became part of the monitoring process. They began to tell us if someone had a weapon, or drugs, or contraband that they were not supposed to have on campus. Many times we were able to resolve those cases quietly." Students, he adds, reclaimed their school.

Part of the School Development Program insists that consensus must be reached on all decisions, which could be perceived as difficult and frustrating. Williams, however, is a proponent of reaching consensus. "In the long run," he says, "if you look at the amount of time it takes to go back and clean up decisions

"I believe firmly that people do not venture out into new directions unless they feel they have the trust of the administration and also that there is trust between teachers and parents."



"What we have learned from others becomes our own by reflection."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Student outcomes showed dramatic gains as a result of the School Development Program, Williams reports, pointing to a 95 percent increase in the number of students with perfect attendance. There was a 75 percent increase in the number of students who made the A/B honor rolls; a 50 percent decrease in major disciplinary infractions by students. In survey results, 96 percent of teachers reported that they liked the school's new schedule; 77 percent of students reported that they liked it as well. "We were able to demonstrate," Williams says with some pride, "a 25 percent increase in the number of students enrolled in higher-level courses and a 25 percent decrease in the number of dropouts."

when consensus for them wasn't reached, you see that you gain time if consensus is reached when the decision is made."

One of the most surprising — and gratifying — results of the School Development Program's implementation at West Mecklenburg was that teachers rose from a previously demoralized state to take ownership for the progress of the reform. "Teachers rose to the challenge," he says. "Initially, we had a buddy system in place. It didn't matter if you were doing what was right. Instead, everything was framed in terms of: 'Are you my friend? Do we socialize? Do I like you?'

"When we moved to a higher level of professionalism, teachers bought into the reform. They stopped protecting ineffective teachers and started making decisions based on what was best for students as opposed to what was best for adults."

Improved Student Outcomes

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As part of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg system's quality control, the district surveys teachers, students, and parents on an annual basis, and the information is included as part of each school's district evaluation along with other indicators of success. The survey also showed significant gains. "In 1992-93," Williams reports, "73.2 percent of teachers felt that students were intimidated frequently by other students, whereas the following year that number decreased to 21.4 percent. The average for the district was 31 percent. Approximately 81.3 percent of teachers saw violence as a frequent problem in 1992-93. Three years later that number was down to 21.7 percent; the average for the system for the high schools was 23 percent. In 1992-93, only 23.9 percent of teachers believed that students behaved in an orderly manner; in the 1994-95 school year that number was up to 62.2 percent, while the district average was 49 percent."

Ninety-six percent of teachers reported that they liked the school's new schedule; 77 percent of students reported that they liked it as well. "We were able to demonstrate," Williams says with some pride, "a 25 percent increase in the number of students enrolled in higher-level courses and a 25 percent decrease in the number of dropouts."

Finally, two figures on the survey related to Williams's leadership included a finding that 93.9 percent of teachers believed that the principal was current on educational trends and innovations, while 85.7 percent of teachers believed their principal gave teachers authority to make key decisions.

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Success for All: The Rockford Public Schools, Rockford, Illinois

The Rockford School District in Rockford, Illinois, has a total student population of 26,000 students, approximately 60 percent Caucasian and 40 percent African American. Debby Dimke is the General Director for Community Academy Schools, where she oversees reform efforts at the elementary level in the Rockford district. A former elementary school principal, she pioneered the Success for All model at her school in 1991 and went on to become program manager for the Success for All schools in Rockford. Previously an associate professor of education at Rockford College, she also has been a teacher in the Rockford district at the high school, middle school, and elementary school levels.

A 1989 desegregation order provided impetus for the Rockford Public Schools to examine current reforms with the goal of improving student achievement, particularly for students of color. As Debby Dimke explains, "Since 1989, initiatives have been presented to us that might help increase achievement in our district."

Of the 38 elementary schools in the district, the 14 schools with the largest populations of minority children were also the lowest-achieving schools in the district. "Of the 14 schools," Dimke says, "10 adopted a Success for All program over a four-year period. In the first year of our work with Success for All, we began with five schools and since have added five. As we learn about Success for All in our district and as we have implemented the program, our success and experiences have caused other schools in the district to become interested, to explore the program, and then adopt it as their school's instructional focus."

Why Success for All and not another reform? What made Success for All the best reform for the Rockford School District?

"All of us felt it was critical to have site-based decision-making," Dimke says. "We all believed the reform should not be mandated, but rather selected by the teachers who would be the ones to implement the program. We explored many other initiatives, but teachers voted for Success for All because of its research base, its accomplishments in raising student achievement, and also its instructional strategies."

Key elements of Success for All were notions familiar to teachers, including engaging in cooperative learning, using performance-based assessments, and monitoring student progress continuously, rather than occasionally. Dimke was especially pleased with the opportunity to accelerate the learning of students whose achievement was already high enough to warrant it — debunking the image of Success for All as a program limited to youth identified as at risk of academic failure.

"Within Success for All," she says, "there is an option to accelerate students in reading because students can emerge from their homeroom reading at grade level and actually receive instruction above grave level.

"Within the program, we especially liked the extra option for acceleration of students and the tutoring component. The tutoring component can be used either to help students who aren't progressing as expected or to accelerate those students who are at grade level or above. Success for All seemed the most comprehensive program to teachers of the ones we considered, it was implementable in their eyes, and it answered a lot of the needs of their particular schools."

Did it offer sufficient structure so that teachers were comfortable working within its parameters? Was its structure too rigid or too vague?

"From my perspective," Dimke notes, "Success for All gave us a framework to look at instruction in our building, a framework to affect students positively, and a framework to involve parents. Many people," she adds, "look at Success for All as a canned program. They see it as routine. In Rockford, we don't look at it that way. We view it as providing us a framework to look at strategies

for best practice and how to adjust our practice to meet student needs for accelerated progress."

Although Success for All concentrates on raising the achievement of those children identified as at risk of academic failure, to Dimke the possibilities for acceleration are one of its most alluring features. "When a child makes steady progress and works above grade level," she notes, "many programs don't have options for them. It is up to the classroom teacher to try to individualize instruction or offer other support for that student.

"We know that this program raises expectations for teachers. Their focus is to accelerate children above grade level as quickly as possible."

Instead of an inflexible program with rigid steps that teachers and students must take, Dimke believes Success for All offers flexibility along with structure. "Our teachers are telling us that they take the strategies from Success for All and try to apply them to other content areas, because they are seeing the power of what children are learning through these strategies. If teachers feel that things are working well enough that they want to expand what they're doing in the reading area into other content areas, this tells us a great deal."

In the 1994-95 school year, the Rockford School District surveyed 125 staff members who were implementing aspects of Success for All in eight schools; 95 percent reported that they believed Success for All was an "extremely effective" program for accelerating students.

Clearly, this perception pleases Dimke, because the goals for instruction are much more ambitious than bringing students to grade level. Perceiving the need to accelerate instruction as well, she believes, removes whatever stigma may be attached to identifying a needy student population and targeting a reform solely at those students.

"To some degree, that turns staff off," Dimke comments, "because when you work with the program in that way, instruction is so tight and so precise. On the other hand, the tightness of the structure causes us to know where we are going, what we are doing, and how we can build upon it."

One concern teachers working with Success for All report is lack of follow-through once children leave elementary school; they experience feelings of responsibility for the children who have progressed as a result of the program. "Our teachers say: 'Once they go to middle school, what happens?' They are concerned that their needs will not be met on an individual basis. Because of this, we are starting to look at our middle school programs this year."

Part of Success for All's program includes a 90-minute daily block for reading instruction. "Teachers and principals tell us that during that block they rarely have a discipline problem. When instruction is intense and powerful — and when it meets the needs of children — motivation increases, task behavior increases, the love of reading increases, and children are so engaged that there is rarely an off-task child."

Teachers also experience increased levels of engagement in their work, she reports. "Teachers feel they really are accomplishing something during those 90-minute periods."

The Success for All Program is typically funded through Title I funds, but in Rockford, because of the desegregation order, schools receive supplemental funds and Title I monies to fund the program. "Obviously, schools across the country are implementing Success for All that do not have supplemental funds," Dimke says, "and yet they are able to work with the program."

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"Since Success for All is specific that children need to perform at and above grade level standards, each building has to articulate what those grade-level standards should be in each building or across schools. Particularly in lower-achieving schools, there is the focus on lower achievers, what we should do, what our expectations are. Instead, this program has focused us on developing higher expectations and accelerating higher achievers. Our mindset is to have all children above grade level in reading instruction."

Perhaps the most integral concept in Success for All is that teachers and other school staff must persist with each child until that child succeeds. What does that look like in practice?

"Within the Success for All framework, there is a Family Support Team," Dimke says. "When a child isn't progressing at acceptable levels, teachers make a referral to the team, which consists of a curriculum implementer, a student support specialist, a parent liaison, and the building principal. Those referrals are scrutinized by the team to see what kind of intervention can be implemented to maximize progress.

"In Rockford, we have a 24-hour response timeframe when a referral is made," she adds. "Someone is in that classroom within 24 hours, saying to the teacher: 'What do you need right now? What does the child need right now?', so that the team can actively begin to work on solutions."

Now that the teams are in place and functioning on short turnaround time, principals have difficulty imagining what it would be like to operate without them, Dimke emphasizes. "The teams carry on so many activities that they offer tremendous support to the entire community."

Yet another support system for teachers when students do not progress is the tutoring intervention, another key component of Success For All. "Children can be referred for a 20-minute per day tutoring time, one-on-one, which is very intensive instruction to address whatever concerns the teacher has about the student's progress.

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Staff Development

Part of Success for All's program includes three days of inservice prior to the beginning of the school year, with other staff development offered on an ongoing basis throughout the year. "Staff development is very ongoing," Dimke comments, "with multiple inservice activities relative to Success for All implementation where we reflect, share, and collaborate."

Consultants from Johns Hopkins conduct the three-day inservice at the beginning of the school year, working with the specifics of the reading program and the 90-minute reading block, Dimke adds. "Because we have been working with this program for four years, we have many in-house experts who can do this training. This past summer we had a balance of trainers from Johns Hopkins and also from the Rockford School District. We are trying to develop our own expert bank of trainers, because it empowers teachers to build and refine the program, to constantly look for solutions."

Although consultants are helpful and often necessary, Dimke believes that the staff in the district must be "the critical analyzers. The consultants, at this point, offer verification checks," she says, "but we have to be the ones who decide what our data says, how we adjust, how we stretch, how we improvise to move forward. I am pushing for us to

be our own guide. After all, we have to create the results; that is up to us. I don't rely on the consultants from Success for All for much anymore except for updates and new information."

Working With "Experts"

Do consultants from Success for All encourage or push schools to work independently? "Not to my standard," Dimke says candidly. "One of the difficulties of doing this for four years is having new consultants each year. In some ways, that can be an advantage because you get a new perspective or someone else's expertise on a particular aspect of the program. It can also be a downside because somebody wasn't there to see how you've grown or how your implementation of Success for All is different from others. We have to spend time with the consultant to catch them up on where we have been and where we are going."

In general, Dimke believes that school staff should — and must — be proactive in implementing external reforms. "I direct where we need to go with the program from visiting the schools and working with principals. We probably direct more of the program than other districts do. But that is how the reform initiative will work — when people are invested in it.

"For me, it is a governance issue. My expectations of principals are that they direct the reform, are responsive to the feedback they get, and adjust the initiative accordingly. The consultants are very helpful, but we need to do things for ourselves. In other words, I see the whole reform initiative as a checks and balances system. When the consultant leaves, we need to feel empowered enough that we can conduct the kind of thinking about the reform that is needed."

Since Success for All concentrates on raising the achievement of students identified as "at risk," does that term send a negative message to parents?

"That is not the message we want to give," Dimke notes. "We tell parents and teachers that this is a program that can work for all children, including very high-achieving students. That is how we want it to be known in our district. This is not a program just for those students who are the lowest achievers. It certainly has the framework to assist lower achievers, but it also has the framework to assist higher achievers."

An Inclusive Framework

She adds, "I would have been offended as a parent if my child attended one of the schools where we implemented Success for All and was an honor roll student — and suddenly was put into what was called a reading program for at-risk students. As one of the first schools that worked with Success for All, we went against program expectations. Although the tutoring component is designed for children who aren't making progress, for high achievers we use it to continue their acceleration. Districts and people who are implementing reforms need to be able to tailor them to their own needs."

What kind of outcomes can Dimke report with Success For all? "We have a high mobility rate for both students and teachers," Dimke points out. "Twenty-five percent of our teachers were first-year teachers last year. Factoring out the mobility, we found that when we looked at the children who had been in the program for three years, all are at grade level or above. In two of the eight schools, children in grades three and six are above grade level on standardized tests. To us, that is a very positive indicator that they are learning and progressing.

"We were especially pleased," she concludes, "because one out of four teachers were new to teaching. We hope that this year we will see equal or better results in the other six schools."

"We tell parents and teachers that this is a program that can work for all children, including very high-achieving students. That is how we want it to be known in our district. This is not a program just for those students who are the lowest achievers.

The Accelerated Schools Project: North Middle School, Aurora, Colorado

North Middle School is located in Aurora, Colorado, and has a student population of approximately 750, grades six through eight. Approximately 40% are African American, 15% Hispanic, and 38% Caucasian, with a very small percentage of Asian and Native American children. Over 70% qualify for free or reduced lunch. The school was originally a pilot middle school for the Accelerated Schools Project. Its principal, Rich Rusak, has a combined education and business background. Rusak has been North Middle School's principal for ten years; prior to that he was an assistant principal, a learning coordinator, a middle school teacher, and a high school teacher.

A districtwide shift from a traditional, centralized administration to a site-based, shared decision-making model was the key facilitator for reform at North Middle School, Rich Rusak maintains. Previous layers of administrators, including middle school directors, evaporated with the shift to increased decision making at the building level, and with that shift came new freedom to experiment and take aggressive steps toward change.

Rusak's 1990 sabbatical, spent researching current reforms, led him to the research of Henry Levin at Stanford University and the Accelerated Schools Project, which he embraced with enthusiasm almost immediately. Why Accelerated Schools? Rusak explains, "Their research was an exact match for our shifting population, which includes high levels of non-English-speaking immigrants, as well as the increase of poverty levels in our school. Aurora is a very diverse community; we range from the very poor to the very wealthy within a span of about seven miles."

The process that the project recommends was another reason it appealed so much to Rusak and his staff. "The Accelerated Schools process, unlike other reforms, offered a defined process that comes with a set of three principles focused on academic excellence as a final outcome."

Although the process is quite specific, Rusak does not see it as prescriptive. "No two accelerated schools are alike," he emphasizes. "Through this process, you are able to build your own school."

In what ways does the Accelerated Schools process differ from those of other reforms? Rusak says, "Other reforms don't really define the process for you, leaving you lost as to what to do. They might give you an outcome but don't tell you how to get there. The Accelerated Schools Project is just the opposite. They give you the process and you define your own outcome."

Although the Accelerated Schools Project had a heavy initial emphasis on elementary schools, North Middle School became a pilot middle school for the project. "Our staff were able to have on-campus training at Stanford University as part of our participation as a pilot school," he explains, "and help at our site, which is not always available through the Project but was available to us as a pilot school."

Becoming an Accelerated School

The Accelerated Schools Project establishes firm guidelines for becoming an accelerated school, including the importance of the initial exploration and "buy-in" of their process. How did this process play out at North Middle School?

Rusak, who had heard Henry Levin speak, decided to gather $100 from each school within North Middle School's district quadrant and use the money to enlist Levin as a speaker to galvanize staff around the Accelerated Schools Project. "Dr. Levin spent the day in our quadrant, which gave everyone an opportunity to interact with him. Since he came to our school, we had a few more hours to spend with him."

The next step was a schoolwide decision to visit some schools that had begun the Accelerated Schools process. "With district support, we put

together a team of seven people, including the assistant superintendent, the then-director of the middle schools, myself, and four teachers. We visited schools in California, and when we returned we reported what we saw to the staff."

As a result, the staff voted almost unanimously — "minus one person," Rusak reports — to proceed. "A big reason they chose to do so was that they had met and heard the man with the voice," he says. "We had also been talking about it for about two years. Our next step was to hire a trainer from our own school who went to Stanford and trained in the process that summer, came back, and launched the school." This trainer took responsibility for training North Middle School's staff in the principles of the Accelerated Schools Project.

Is this a heavy responsibility for one person? What type of staff development do schools participating in the Accelerated Schools Project typically receive? "It helps to have several people trained at Stanford," Rusak says, "because that training is designed to help you launch your school into the project. When you begin schoolwide, the initial training launch lasts a day and a half to two days; you learn about the concepts and philosophy of Accelerated Schools. At the same time, you begin the visioning process, asking: 'What do we want to become? What do we want to teach?'

He notes, "The beginning of that first year was very intense."

The organization of the Accelerated Schools Project suggested major changes for North Middle School, including a change in the school's schedule; the formation of "cadres" or teams, each with different foci; and the creation of a schoolwide steering committee to which each cadre reports.

The first year, he reports, the school focused primarily on training, increasing familiarity with Accelerated Schools concepts, and dealing with whatever issues that arose. Progress, he emphasizes, is gradual; any reform takes time before it can be fully realized.

"In our fourth year in the project, we are starting to look at how the concept of powerful learning should be the school focus," he says. Although the school is examining and exploring the concept of "powerful learning," that does not mean that issues of student learning and achievement were not paramount at the beginning of the reform effort.

The Structure of an Accelerated School

North Middle School is divided into seven cadres or teams, ranging in size from five to approximately 15, which deal with academic excellence, student needs, student discipline, safety, communication, technology, and staff development. Participation in cadres is by self-selection, which occurs at the beginning of the school year. "There is no change during the school year," Rusak emphasizes. "That is both a staff decision and an Accelerated Schools idea. If you jump from cadre to cadre, you take with you experiences that should be left with the previous cadre."

The school follows the guidelines of the Accelerated School Project. Cadres report to a steering committee that makes recommendations either back to the cadres or up to the school as a whole. The steering committee, Rusak says, is comprised of at least one member from every cadre, along with the principal and administrative team. An at-large group of parents also attends steering committee meetings — which are purposefully held at night to maximize community attendance — and are invited to bring their children with them. Other members of the steering committee include a city representative and an individual from a large educational foundation in the state.

"Our community won't come to the school if they feel they will be lectured or talked to in formal situations. Therefore, we work to make the school environment very casual."

What changes have occurred in family and community involvement since the school began the Accelerated Schools Project? "Our community won't come to the school," Rusak says, "if they feel they will be lectured or talked to in formal situations. Therefore, we work to make the school environment very casual. We have many immigrant parents; we have a lot of parents who did not have good experiences in school. We also have many young parents, who may have had babies when they were 13, 14, or 15 years old.

"Substantively, we get parents involved through their children's academic work. Parents are invited to come during the school day to see projects; lots of folks show up for those. The most profound difference right now is that we have had a movement in the school to change the parent/teacher conference from a traditional conference to a portfolio presentation by students to their parents. That, in itself, is very significant, because parents feel much more comfortable coming to the school. They are not going to hear bad or good things about their kid; they are going to hear and see a presentation of what their child and what other children are doing in terms of work. The teacher is available for consultation in the room."

At the beginning of North Middle School's involvement in the Accelerated Schools Project, parents were solicited for comments every time they entered the school. "These comments were written down; we have 48 single-spaced, typed pages of input from parents along with staff and the community. This is how we formed our vision, which we pared down to six statements.

"We also held a big meeting in our cafeteria using a cordless microphone in a 'Donahue' format, asking people what we should study in the school, what they wanted to know, what questions they had, and what their perceptions were about the school. Over about four to five months we assessed what was going on in the school. Rather than trying to form a report about the school that was good, we tried to find out what actually was going on, because it was that data that shaped all of our work — from cadres on up."

Student Achievement and Learning

What have been the major changes in student achievement and learning? What have been the strategies for making the changes? What have been the major problems, and how have they been overcome?

Rusak points first to the work of the cadre called Academic Excellence. "Their focus is student achievement and how we can raise it. This cadre spent the first year organizing itself and setting expectations for students."

After about a year and a half, they selected a curricular area for focus, typical of what Rusak terms the "flexibility" of the Accelerated Schools Project, which allows schools to select their own areas of emphasis.

"It was interesting to me," he says, "that instead of language arts, math, or science, staff selected something broader, which was writing. Everyone was trained by an outside consultant in ways to help students organize their writing, some very specific 'how-tos.'"

Happily enough, all staff were interested. "Our goal was very specific: We set one of our school goals for the following year in writing, using it as a pilot test with this particular way of teaching writing. We used outcome-based rubrics already in place at the middle level in the district, and following a year of schoolwide writing instruction, assessed student writing samples. We decided that our goal would be to see all of our kids make an increase by at least one level on a

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scale of one to four by the end of the school year."

The results, he reports, were "astonishing. We had so many kids scoring at the three level — four is exceptional — but the three level definitely means proficiency. We decided to expand our writing efforts this year, expanding as much as possible throughout the curriculum. This means," he adds, "everyone is involved in this effort: math teachers, science teachers, industrial arts teachers, music teachers, and P.E. teachers."

North Middle School staff have received feedback from high school teachers who work with students who have graduated. "We hear remarkable things from high school teachers and principals about how they are able to separate our kids from others because of their writing ability," Rusak says.

He uses the example of schoolwide writing to emphasize the differences between schools invested in the Accelerated Schools Project and schools involved in other reforms. "The difference between an accelerated school and other schools," he says, "is that we draw upon resources that already exist, rather than working with resources imposed on us. In this case, we called in people from our district who work in performance-based education, who trained us how to assess our students' writing based on a rubric."

Powerful Learning

Rusak turns next to a discussion of the concept of "powerful learning" — an integral part of the Accelerated Schools philosophy. "Each school in the project wrestles with it," he says, "just as they do at Stanford. We now have four accelerated schools in our district, and recently we have focused on this concept together. We are asking: What kinds of things can and should teachers do to make learning powerful? What should they do to have a long-term impact?

"The first part of the process focuses on what is truly important. How do we know what to teach? Once that is decided, how do you teach it so that children learn? As an Accelerated School, our goal is to close the learning gap between students that have lower achievement than others. What is defective is the belief that students need to be remediated while the rest of the school moves on instructionally. Obviously, with this approach, the students who are behind fall further and further behind.

"We say that all of our students need to be treated as gifted and talented by building on their strengths. The focus of our school is finding out what those strengths are and at the same time using teaching practices that are the most effective. Just as we decided to focus on writing because it is universal, we also want our staff to focus on higher levels of questions — regardless of what they are teaching — so that our students have to go through a complex learning process."

School Climate

Empowerment coupled with responsibility create a sound school climate, Rusak maintains. "In our school, we have survey data which indicate that people feel they have control over the decisions that are made as well as over teaching and curriculum. As an example, last year some staff expressed a need for more staff development. Our student-teacher cadre, which is in charge of everything about school climate — from smaller things such as parties and lounge decorations to bigger responsibilities, which include building an advisory committee — decided they would take charge of staff development. They will run a steering committee where all the cadres in the school are represented and can speak to what they need for training and staff development."

Rusak finds school climate especially interesting. "We have found that through involvement in their own governance process, staff feel they have control over their own situations. A key principle of Accelerated Schools is empowerment coupled with responsibility, so empowering people is one thing, but giving them the responsibility to produce the outcome means that they are accountable for it — a whole other issue."

Is there anything the Accelerated Schools model does not attend to? Is there anything that has been neglected or that should receive more emphasis?

"My experience," Rusak summarizes, "has been nothing but positive. I understand this project thoroughly. If there is a mission to the project, it is to become self-sufficient — and this is incumbent upon the people working in the school."

The Coalition of Essential Schools: Sullivan High School, Chicago, Illinois

Sullivan High School is located in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago and has a student population of approximately 1,400, which includes a small component of 50 students enrolled in a seventh and eighth grade program. The population is diverse: approximately 55% African American; 20% Hispanic, 15% Asian, and the remainder Caucasian and Native American. Patricia K. Anderson has been the principal of Sullivan High School in Chicago, Illinois for two years and, before that, an assistant principal for six years. She also worked for the Illinois State Board of Education as a state coordinator for the Illinois Alliance of Essential Schools. Anderson has worked extensively on school reform through the Coalition of Essential Schools. She is a member of the Chicago Annenberg School Reform Collaborative.

Patricia K. Anderson is clearly no stranger to educational reforms: As a teacher at Sullivan High School, and then as its assistant principal, she was active in implementing key concepts of the Padeia Program based on Mortimer Adler's Paidea Proposal (1982), beginning in 1984. In 1989, Sullivan moved to integrate key features of the Coalition of Essential Schools — with Anderson's enthusiastic support. To Anderson, the reforms complement each other; weaving what might appear to be disparate strands into the same fabric is the challenge for her and for school staff.

To explain how Sullivan decided to work with ideas advanced by the Coalition of Essential Schools, Anderson first explains the roots of reform that began 11 years ago with the advent of the Padeia Program. These roots, she maintains, made it easier to grasp the ideas central to the Coalition of Essential Schools. "As part of the original Padeia Program," she says, "we have weekly seminars in English and social studies, monthly seminars in science and mathematics. We also have special offerings, such as our all-school seminar, which we conduct four times a year."

The "all-school seminar," she explains, breaks the student body into a freshman-sophomore mix and a junior-senior mix by a random computer sort. "Every teacher and administrator leads a seminar for a 55-minute period, which focuses on readings that are selected by faculty groups and given to students through their English classes. Students then come to this all-day seminar on those selected readings."

Seminars have been integral to teaching and instruction as well, she explains, with regular seminars for the school's approximately 80 teachers who break into four groups to make the seminar structure manageable. Anderson says, "For some time, we have used — and continue to use — this forum of a seminar to accomplish movement for the school as a whole."

The Padeia Program was integrated into Sullivan gradually, beginning with three groups of freshmen in 1984. "In the second year, we brought in another group of freshmen. Within four years we had the entire program up and running. It accomplished so much in terms of our goals — turning students into active learners who were responsible for their work and could articulate and exhibit that work — that we decided the whole school would become part of it in some fashion."

Why did Sullivan decide to add the elements of Essential Schools to an already flourishing reform? "Our principal at the time, Robert Brazil," Anderson says, "looked at the success we were experiencing with the Padeia Program and also looked at the Nine Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. He saw these principles as links to what we were trying to do. In addition to the active learning with responsibility component of the Essential Schools program, we liked the concept of the teacher as coach.

"Our principal wanted to broaden our efforts," she continues, "and change the entire educational process — not just have one method of instruction. The Coalition certainly offered more schoolwide changes than the Padeia piece could."

To weave the two together, school staff created a diploma by exhibition, which was used for the

"We think we are helping to prove that a student can read, write, and articulate her ideas," Anderson notes, "which sometimes doesn't happen even though the coursework is completed."

first time in 1990. "We took our seminar and decided that all seniors would go through this rite of passage," Anderson explains. Seniors participate in seminars led by pairs of faculty in which their ability to articulate their understanding of faculty-chosen readings is measured.

"After the seminar," Anderson explains, "teachers have a rubric that they use to see if the student can articulate ideas, is able to read carefully, and qualifies for graduation based on his or her performance in the seminar. In addition to these requirements, seniors must prepare a three to five-page paper on suggested questions devised by the faculty committee. These papers are read by the two teachers who lead the seminar in which the student is placed, and a teacher-developed rubric applies to that as well."

Far from an empty exercise, evaluations of student performance on the twin tasks have real, concrete consequences for students, which can extend to determining whether the student is permitted to graduate.

"We think we are helping to prove that a student can read, write, and articulate her ideas," Anderson notes, "which sometimes doesn't happen even though the coursework is completed. If a student doesn't pass this requirement, we try to help that student through coaching. If that still doesn't help, the student does not pass English and does not graduate."

Student outcomes are reported on standardized tests, which frustrates Anderson. "Our test scores have gone up on some areas and fallen in others. The reason I would give to explain that is the change in our socioeconomic status. Our population at poverty line has tripled in the last three years. We have a large immigrant population.

"Yet when we take our students to forums where they demonstrate what they have learned, where they discuss extremely technical issues, people are impressed with how articulate our students are. They are not designing the curriculum, which is something the Coalition would like to see, but they are very engaged. We have to prove to people that we can do both the standardized tests and the authentic assessments.

"Hopefully," she adds, "we can get to a point where the authentic measures will supplant the standardized measures, although I'm not sure that will ever happen."

Another way in which the Padeia Program is complemented and extended by the Coalition principles is through the notion of teachers coaching students. "We tried to do that much more comprehensively in all classes once we added the Coalition ideas," she says, "and tried to get teachers to understand the process, be energized by it, and see the benefits of the program."

It is not easy, she concedes — teacher turnover is high. "We continue to push ahead with it and re-energize teachers along the way."

Obstacles and Challenges

What have been the outstanding obstacles and challenges since the Coalition was introduced as a reform? How have school staff overcome them?

"We haven't lost momentum," Anderson reflects, "at least, not for any period of time. If we have slowed down at any point, it is because of other forces coming from the Board of Education. One year, for example, they redid staffing. We lost some teachers and had to juggle some things around. That is the type of occurrence we cope with from time to time, but it had little to do with our momentum."

The work of the Coalition is fueled by a school-wide commitment to professional development for teachers. "This helps teachers to understand that there are many other ways to learn and to do things. We pair with other Coalition schools and do staff development with them; we rent videotape series for teachers, which include people such as Linda Darling-Hammond, Ted Sizer, or James Comer. When teachers have a free period, they come into

our library to view them.

"We also have a professional library for teachers, centered around Coalition of Essential Schools ideas, alternative assessment, and the like. We engage in many Coalition activities. We find," she notes, "that when teachers go out of the school, get new ideas, and bring them back, they are much more likely to help others to engage in those ideas."

The newest part of Sullivan's work with the Coalition includes the beginnings of the "Critical Friends" group. "Ten teachers will work with someone from the Coalition who will be a coach for them," Anderson explains. "I will buy substitute time for them so that they can view other teachers' classes from within that group and then debrief about their colleagues' pedagogy."

"We find that when teachers go out of the school, get new ideas, and bring them back, they are much more likely to help others to engage in those ideas."

There is a fine line between pushing reform onto unwilling teachers and encouraging them strongly to participate — a fine line that can feel like a tightrope to a principal. "Some teachers realized their plates were too full for this group this particular year and decided they will come on-board next year. That, I think, will carry it further because we are hitting reform where it needs to be, in the classroom.

"We work with people so that they pair with others, we have a Steering Committee on Essential Schools so that each department is represented, and information flows back and forth from that departmental representative to us and back again."

Sullivan is a conventionally structured school, with the exception of the Coalition of Essential Schools steering committee, Anderson says. "We thought long and hard about this, and we looked at some Coalition schools which had 8-block schedules. Our teachers didn't want 100-minute periods, so we decided to structure through ideas rather than time slots." In other words, she emphasizes, it wasn't worth expending energy battling over a structural change when larger, more important educational issues were at stake.

Some scheduling departs from what is traditional for high schools, however, with freshmen in paired English and history classes. "Each student has the same history and English teacher, so that those teachers can plan their instruction together. We have built in common time weekly, and to facilitate their planning, whenever possible we give those teachers their lunches or prep time together."

Relationship to Reform

What does it mean to be a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools? What is Sullivan High School's relationship with the people who lead that reform? "We were one of the first schools in Illinois selected to be in the Coalition program," Anderson says with some pride. "Our relationship clearly has helped us through the years, particularly with ideas for staff development. Their summer training and help in finding people who can come into our school to help teachers in areas such as technology have been especially helpful.

"People have been funneled to us through the Coalition. They come and look at what we do, which helps teachers believe they are doing something special and thus they work harder at it. Through the Coalition, the state gave us some money to help our efforts to buy substitutes to free people so they can participate in professional development activities. It isn't a large amount of money, but it is enough to investigate what the Coalition is all about and then design what we want it to mean to us."

Anderson also worked as interim coordinator for the Illinois Coalition of Essential Schools, which informs her work as principal at Sullivan. "I am much more impatient now," she says. "My perspective has changed. We can

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talk and we can plan, but there is a time when we have to do. I certainly push that agenda much more than I did in the past, because now it is my responsibility as principal of the school."

She sees her perspective as much broader and more research-oriented than it was previously. "Now I look at each little piece within the school and how it plays a part in the total change effort. I try to move that along as quickly as I can, while being patient enough to understand that not everybody moves at the same quick pace. I want to maintain balance so that I can continue to bring people on board. I have allowed people many opportunities to come on board, but at this point the train is leaving and if they have a paycheck, they need to be on board."

Other reforms may emphasize process rather than action, but Anderson credits the Coalition with an emphasis on results and process. "I remind people that the obligation for being in a Coalition and a Padeia school is that they need to be involved in furthering the school's efforts. The extent to which they do so is factored into their evaluations at the end of the year.

"As an 'option' school, teachers came here because of the Padeia program and the majority opted to become part of the Coalition program. They knew that involved an obligation."

Is there an increase in teacher collegiality or other improved teacher outcomes? Does collegiality remain problematic, as it does in many high schools?

"We need to continue to work on it," Anderson says thoughtfully, "but I have seen an increase in it. We try to personalize for our students, so we have to personalize for our faculty. We work in time for tennis tournaments for staff, for basketball, for a golf outing. Many of our teachers are still in school, still taking coursework, so participation in some of these activities is problematic for them."

Is there anything that the Coalition lacks as a reform? To Anderson, any deficits are Sullivan's alone. "We don't involve students enough in the planning process," she says frankly. "More is done to them and around them, and they have little voice in helping us to build their experiences.

"However, as state coordinator I saw how the Coalition works in different schools. Some of the smaller schools in the state had considerable community involvement and were a center of life in their communities — something that is not always the case in an urban setting.

"At one high school, student representatives were always present. At our school, in contrast, we knew we had to push change quickly, so we decided to concentrate on teachers first."

What about the danger of trying to take on too many initiatives simultaneously? "That is a distinct danger," Anderson comments, "and at times our work has become much bigger than we thought it was going to be. It is always necessary to remind staff that although our focus this year might be on personalization, just because we move on to something else next year does not mean that we are all finished with personalization. It will never finish. We will add on other pieces, but we hope we have a solid grounding before we do. We also want to work on how one piece relates to another piece. This gives our staff the opportunity to become specialists in an area so we don't have to call upon that 20 percent of the staff again and again."

Despite the ongoing challenges of reform in a secondary school, Anderson remains upbeat. "The Coalition of Essential Schools," she concludes, "gave us flexibility and aid in finding ways to reach the goals we set for ourselves.

"We can talk and we can plan, but there is a time when we have to do."

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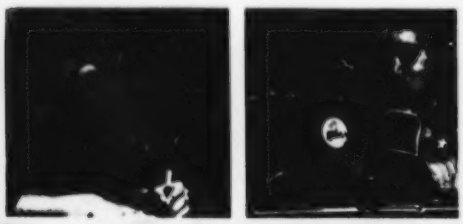

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